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ABSTRACT

This document reports on a current project of the Institute of Education at the Uppsala School of Education, designed to evaluate the effects of extending English instruction in Swedish schools into the initial school years. Swedish schools presently offer an average of 3.5 hours per week of English in school years 4 to 9, a total average of 21 hours per week over the primary school years. The project here described aims to study the effects of (1) distributing these 21 hours among school years 1 to 9, and (2) increasing the total number of hours markedly (to about 30), concentrating these additional hours on the lower school years, especially the second and third. It is intended to measure the effects of such a program in terms of cognitive, psychomotor and affective functions in English and other subjects, especially Swedish and Mathematics. The present progress report concentrates on the selection of the experimental groups, the tests used to measure the effects of the language program, and project plans for the immediate future. (FWB)

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Project title: English in the Junior Stage (EPÅL)

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Background of the Project

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From several quarters the view has been expressed that obligatory instruction in English should be given as early as the first year at school. The Head of the Department stated, on the occasion of the comprehensive school reform in 1962, when English was made compulsory from the fourth school year onwards, that "Experiments in English from still more junior school years would be likely to show promising results within the near future", and a desire for experiments in English teaching for the first school year has been expressed by various orgainizations, including the Swedish Confederation of Trade Unions and the Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations, among others. Experts in the field of psycholinguistics have declared that the younger the pupil, the easier it is for him or her to master a foreign language, as far as the learning process is concerned.

Various experimental activities have been already been attempted in Sweden, but only in a few cases have the effects been evaluated The instructional material used for these experimental activities has hardly satisfied the demands which would be required to meet the situation to-day.

Aim of the Project

At present the number of hours of instruction deveted to English is on an average 3.5 per week in school years 4-9. The total figured calculated for the school years is thus 21 hours per week. With effect from 1972 this number of hours will be allocated to school years 3-9. The aim of the project is to study the effects of

1) to distribute these 21 hours among school years 1-9 and

2) to increase the total number of hours markedly (to about 30), whereby this extra allocation of hours of instruction will be concentrated on the junior school years, especially 2 and 3.

The effects of these arrangements will be measured in terms of cognitive, psychomotor and affective functions both in English and other subjects, especially Swedish and Mathematics, since the hours of instruction are taken or borrowed from these subjects, and in other foreign languages, which may be either French or German, depending on the pupil's individual choice.

Plan for the Investigation

The experimental groups will be described in relation to Fig 1.

School Commencement Year	Group	No of Classes	School Year 1	2	3	4	5	...	9	Total
1969	a	30				○ ○	○ ○		○ ○	21 h/w
1970	b	30			○ ○	○ ○	○ ○		○ ○	21 h/w
1971	c	20	o	o o	o o	o o	o o			21 h/w
1972	d	20	o	○ ○	○ ○	○ ○	○ ○			30 h/w

o, ○, ○, illustrate the number of hours of instruction in English per week (large circle = many hours)

Fig 1 Sketch illustrating the four comparison groups.

As instructional material for Groups a and b that available commercially was used. For Groups c and d, on the other hand, the material had to be specially produced within the project. This work was carried out by a group of experienced authors of teaching material. Production on behalf of Group c is now under way. Before work can be started on Group c, certain negotiations must be held with the Board of Education, the teachers' associations and the parent-teachers' associations, among others, since a change in the number of hours devoted to a subject constitutes a radical intervention in the activity of the school.

The experiements take place in schools in Västerås. Several circumstances have been decisive for the choice of this town, among others the following:

1) At Västerås there is a sufficient number of teachers in the junior stage who are competent to teach English,

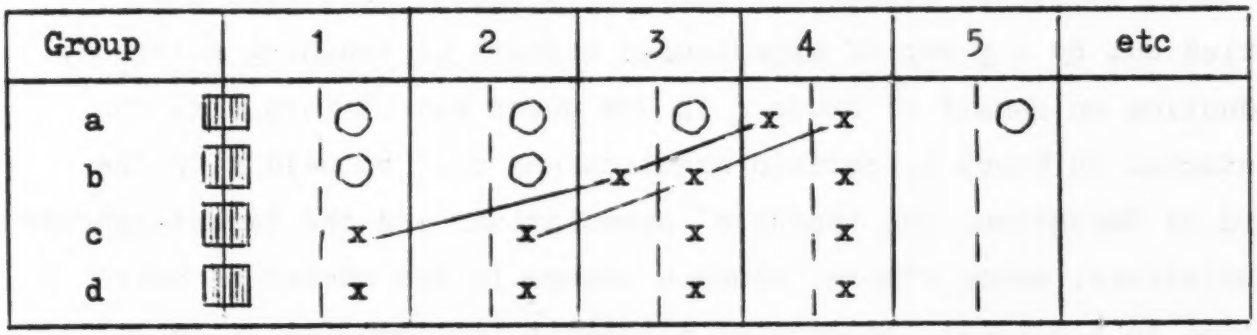
2) The schools are very well equipped with regard to audiovisual aids and language laboratories,

3) The population includes a large number of immigrants from other countries. Immigrant children often encounter difficulties when they are obliged to learn Swedish and a new foreign language. It is possible therefore to count on that idealization of reality, which is associated with an educational experiment, is to some extent compensated by the fact that the basic conditions for instruction are in this case worse than is normally the case.

4) Västerås is situated not far from Uppsala and personnel working on the project can visit the schools where the experiments are in progress without undue cost in terms of time and money.

For the training of teachers in Groups c and d, who are admittedly competent to teach English but have not had experience of such teaching in the junior stage, a special course will be arranged. In this it is planned to use, among other things, TV recordings of the first lessons for a special experimental group, as demonstration material. Furthermore the media available in the schools - overhead projectors, tape recorders, flannelographs, language laboratories, etc.

The effects measured will be compared every year in accordance with the sketch presented in Fig 2.



▥ = school maturity test and other background data such as sex, socio-economic status, nationality, etc.

○ = tests which measure proficiency in Swedish and Mathematics as well as attitudes towards various aspects of school activities.

x = tests which measure proficiency in English

Fig 2 Sketch illustrating Effect Measurements.

The school maturity tests and the other background data will be used to reduce the initial dissimilarities in the groups, which may occur as a result of some variations in the composition of the population from one year to another. At the end of every school year measurements will be made by means of tests of proficiency in Swedish and Mathematics as well as tests of attitudes. The intention is thus to determine to what extent discrepancies exist between groups in these respects as a function of the experimental treatment. In English the tests will take place at suitable times, which will occur in each group after a similar number of hours of instruction.

In addition to these measurements, information will be gathered as to how far the various sections have advanced in a course, measured, for example, in the number of pages of text, after certain given periods of time. Furthermore observations are planned to take note of interplay between teachers and pupils during lessons in English.

Current Work

The sections belonging to Group a were chosen at random. In these classes measurements in Swedish and attitude measurements were carried out during April, 1970. These tests, which will also be used in the other experimental groups, include Skandinaviska Testförlagets entirely freshly constructed diagnostic reading and writing tests as well as two freshly constructed reading comprehension tests, worked out for the project, in addition to another test, also specially designed for the project, of attitudes to various activities such as reading aloud, sums on the blackboard, etc. One of the diagnostic reading and writing tests is carried out as an individual test, the others as group tests, as a rule of half the class. The time required for tests amounts to about 3 hours.

The results of the school maturity test with Ljungbladh´s test were collected with the aid of the school psychologists and during the measurements taken in April the teacher supplied by means of answers to a questionnaire information on the pupils, such as dates of birth, parents´ nationality, the pupil´s mother tongue, the number of days of absence from school during the school year, which page in the first textbook had been reached by a given time. In addition the teacher estimated the pupil´s proficiency in Swedish, if Swedish was not his mother tongue, how well he could read at the beginning of his school year, how proficient he was now in oral expression, written expression and reading and how restless or calm he was in class. Finally the teacher revealed how much and what type of clinical help every pupil had received. In order to obtain as detailed description as possible of every experimental group at the beginning of the experiment, analogous data will be collected on behalf of the other groups. These data will also be used for analyses, for example the description of the situation of immigrant children, which will be reported on in the form of papers for the award of laudatur.

At present the author group is preparing for instruction in the first

school year, Group c, for the Spring Term. The principles for the construction of such material have been determined after thorough analysis of both existing Swedish instructional material in English as well as similar foreign material in English and other foreign languages. Special attention has naturally been paid to the FLES Programmes and work within the Nuffield Project.

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